Assessment, Research and Data Unit

Appropriate Assessment Screening and Determination Report

To:	Maritime Authorisations Unit	**From:**	Dr Ciar O'Toole Senior Marine Advisor
Date:	22/08/2025	**Maritime Usage Licence Application No:**	MUL240001
Applicant:		APEM Ireland, [redacted]	
Type of maritime usage activity in accordance with Schedule 7 of the Maritime Area Planning Act 2021:		*Marine environmental surveys for the purposes of site investigation or in support of an application under Part XXI of the Act of 2000.*	
Location of proposed maritime usage:		Great Blasket Island, Blasket Sound, Co. Kerry	
Licence application received:		25/04/2024	

1. Background

APEM (the applicant) has applied to the Maritime Area Regulatory Authority (MARA) for a Maritime Usage Licence (MUL) to undertake marine environmental surveys for the purposes of site investigation, falling under Schedule 7(3) of the Maritime Area Planning Act 2021 (the MAP Act). The proposed maritime usage activities are required to to undertake ecological baseline surveys at the Great Blasket Island, Blasket Sound, Co. Kerry. The proposed surveys will gather baseline information on behalf of the Office of Public Works (OPW) who intend to redevelop the landing zone on the Great Blasket Island as part of their Island Management Plan. The applicant submitted a Supporting Information for Screening of Appropriate Assessment (SISAA) report in support of the application.

2. Description of maritime usage and local site characteristics

2.1 Brief description of the maritime usage

The work planned for this proposed maritime usage includes the following:

- Deployment of static passive acoustic monitoring (PAM) devices – 4 devices on fixed moorings, maintenance to occur every 2-3 months.
- Intertidal surveys - <1 km of coastline along 3 transects using a Phase II Quantitative Intertidal transect survey, as detailed in the applicants SISAA report which is expected to take four days in total.
- Subtidal surveys – using drop down video (DDV) or camera surveying to determine the presence of subtidal reefs. Dive surveys will be conducted in areas not suitable for the DDV equipment. Expected to take six days in total.
- Grey seal counts and human disturbance monitoring – survey over six days in total with one survey day per month between April and September and any disturbance monitored.
- Boat based surveys – to determine the species of marine mammals and their occurrence and disturbance within the survey area. The aim will be to undertake six surveys over a total of six days, and each survey will coincide with deployment, recovery, and maintenance of the PAM devices to minimise vessel presence within the survey area.

The study area is located in the Blasket Sound around the Great Blasket island in Co. Kerry and the indicative area is 4956.12 hectares (Figure 1). Proposed survey areas are indicated in Figure 2. It is envisaged that the works would be conducted over a one-year period following approval. The licence period applied for is two years.

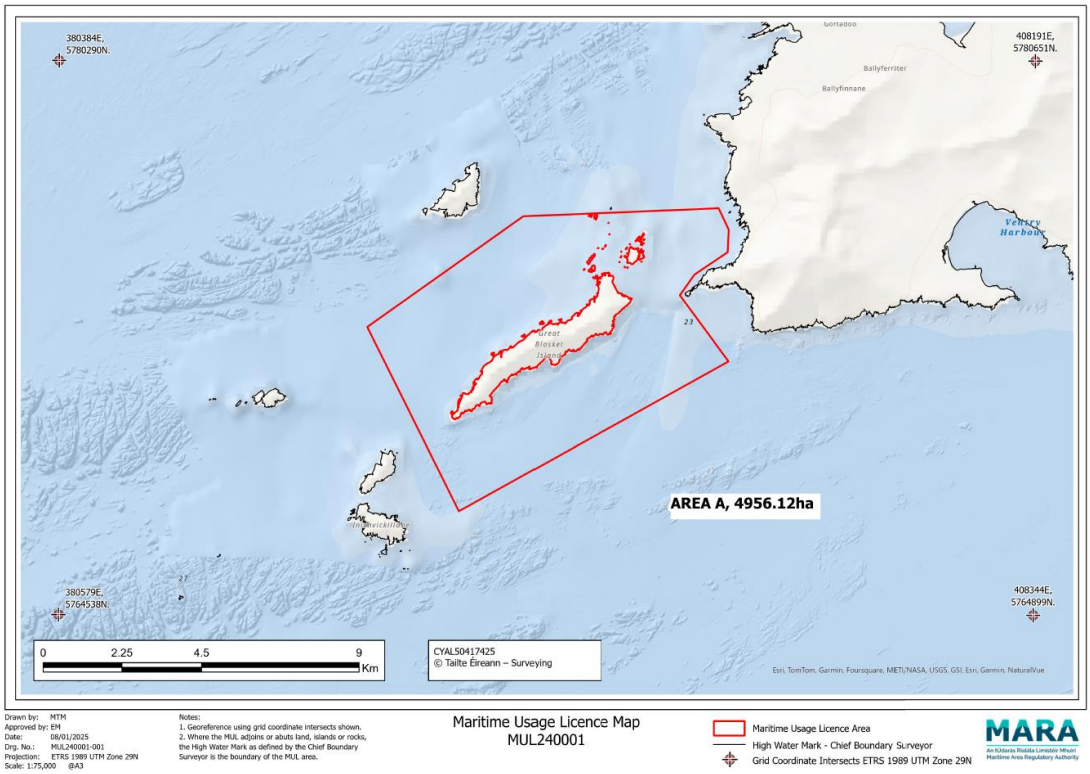

Figure 1 Map showing proposed Maritime Usage Area.

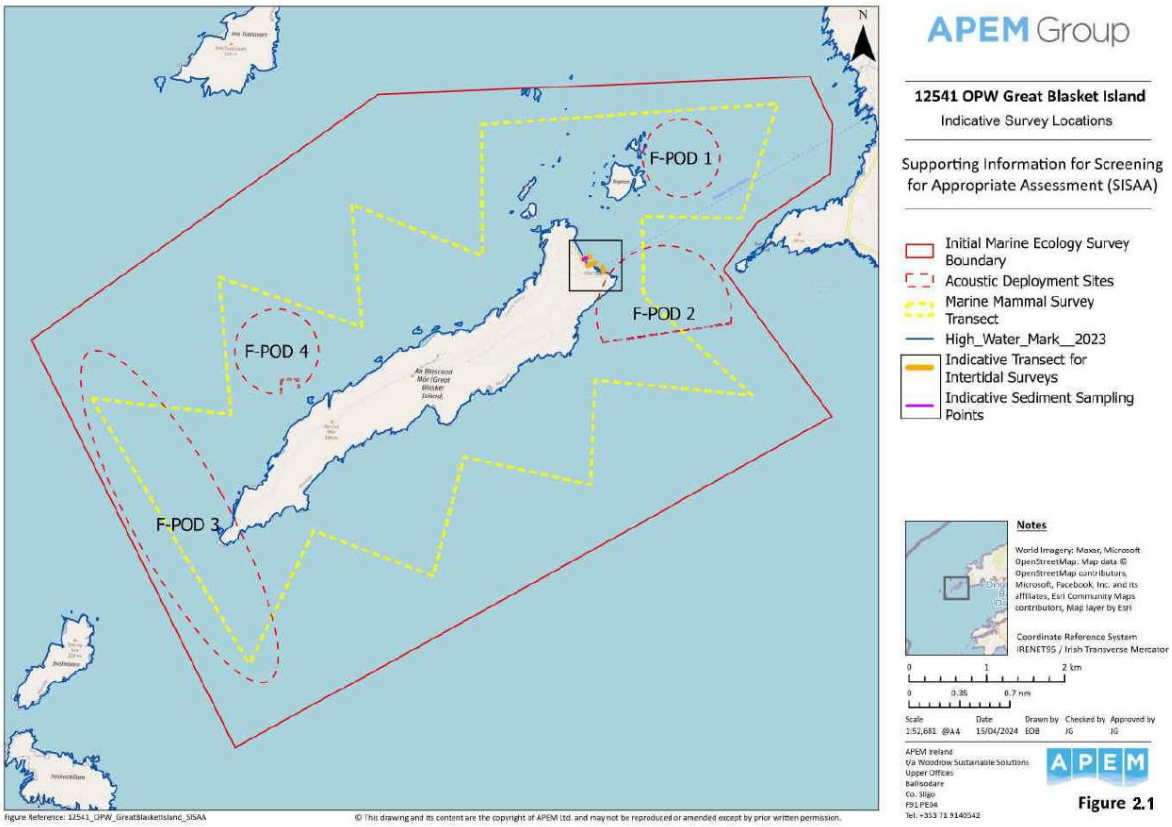

Figure 2: Locations of proposed maritime usage activities (map prepared by applicant)

2.2 Brief description of the site characteristics

The study area consists of a number of habitat types including vegetated sea cliffs and reefs in some of the offshore areas. The water depth ranges from zero in the intertidal to around 50 m offshore. The intertidal areas include soft sediment habitat on the beach and rocky shore. The study area is within the Blasket Island SAC and SPA.

3. Identification of relevant European sites

The MUL application is subject to screening for appropriate assessment in accordance with Regulation 42 of the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011, as amended, to determine if it alone, or in-combination with other plans or projects, is likely to have a significant effect on a European site, in view of best scientific knowledge and the conservation objectives of the sites.

The proposed maritime usage is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of any European site(s). The European sites (Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs)) listed on Table 1 have been considered for appropriate assessment, given the nature, scale and Zone of Influence of the proposed maritime usage, the conservation objectives of the European sites and using the Source-Pathway-Receptor model.

Table 1 - Identification of relevant European sites, their qualifying interests and site-specific conservation objectives.

European site & site code	Distance from proposed MUL area (km)	List of Qualifying Interests	Connections (Source-pathway-receptor)	European Site Screened in	Site-specific conservation objectives
Blasket Islands SAC (Site Code IE 002172)	Within site boundary	Reefs [1170] Vegetated sea cliffs of the Atlantic and Baltic coasts [1230] European dry heaths [4030] Submerged or partially submerged sea caves [8330] Phocoena phocoena (Harbour Porpoise) [1351] Halichoerus grypus (Grey Seal) [1364]	Minimal disturbance to marine species who are already habituated to noise from tourism and shipping activities.	No	NPWS (2014) Conservation Objectives: Blasket Islands SAC 002172. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.
Mount Brandon SAC (Site code 000375)	Approx 15 km	Vegetated sea cliffs of the Atlantic and Baltic coasts [1230] Oligotrophic waters containing very few minerals of sandy plains (Littorelletalia uniflorae) [3110] Oligotrophic to mesotrophic standing waters with vegetation of the Littorelletea uniflorae and/or Isoeto-Nanojuncetea [3130] Northern Atlantic wet heaths with Erica tetralix [4010] European dry heaths [4030] Alpine and Boreal heaths [4060]	No	No	NPWS (2016) Conservation Objectives: Mount Brandon SAC 000375. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

		Species-rich Nardus grasslands, on siliceous substrates in mountain areas (and submountain areas, in Continental Europe) [6230] Blanket bogs (* if active bog) [7130] Siliceous scree of the montane to snow levels (Androsacetalia alpinae and Galeopsietalia ladani) [8110] Calcareous rocky slopes with chasmophytic vegetation [8210] Siliceous rocky slopes with chasmophytic vegetation [8220] Margaritifera margaritifera (Freshwater Pearl Mussel) [1029] Vandenboschia speciosa (Killarney Fern) [6985]			
Valencia Harbour/Portmagee SAC (Site code 002262)	Approx 12 km	Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide [1140] Large shallow inlets and bays [1160] Reefs [1170]	No	No	NPWS (2012) Conservation Objectives: Valencia Harbour/Portmagee Channel SAC 002262. Version 1.0. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

Blasket Islands SPA (Site code IE 004008)	Within site boundary	Fulmar (Fulmarus glacialis) [A009] Manx Shearwater (Puffinus puffinus) [A013] Storm Petrel (Hydrobates pelagicus) [A014] Shag (Phalacrocorax aristotelis) [A018] Lesser Black-backed Gull (Larus fuscus) [A183] Herring Gull (Larus argentatus) [A184] Kittiwake (Rissa tridactyla) [A188] Arctic Tern (Sterna paradisaea) [A194] Razorbill (Alca torda) [A200] Puffin (Fratercula arctica) [A204] Chough (Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax) [A346]	Minimal disturbance to marine species who are already habituated to noise from tourism and shipping activities.	No	NPWS (2025) Conservation Objectives: Blasket Islands SPA 004008. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.
Dingle Peninsula SPA (Site code 004153)	Adjacent to site boundary	Fulmar (Fulmarus glacialis) [A009] Peregrine (Falco peregrinus) [A103] Chough (Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax) [A346]	No	No	NPWS (2025) Conservation Objectives: Dingle Peninsula SPA 004153. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.
Iveragh Peninsula SPA (Site code 004154)	Approx 12 km	Fulmar (Fulmarus glacialis) [A009] Peregrine (Falco peregrinus) [A103] Kittiwake (Rissa tridactyla) [A188] Guillemot (Uria aalge) [A199] Chough (Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax) [A346]	No	No	NPWS (2025) Conservation Objectives: Iveragh Peninsula SPA 004154. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

4. Assessment of likely significant effects

Table 2 identification of potential direct and indirect impacts that may have an effect on the conservation objectives of European sites, taking into account the nature and scale of the proposed maritime usage.

Potential Impacts	**Possible significance of Potential impacts (duration, magnitude, etc.)**
Physical disturbance and habitat loss	Not significant – The overall area of the proposed moorings on the seabed is very small and any potential disturbance of the benthos will be temporary and non-significant. No moorings are proposed to be placed in areas containing sensitive habitat. Physical disturbance due to underwater dive and video surveys will not occur as there will be no contact with benthos. Some small-scale temporary surface habitat disturbance will result from the intertidal works proposed, but this short term and small-scale activity outside of the SAC will not have a significant impact on any European sites.
Visual and above/below water noise disturbance	Not significant - minimal disturbance to marine species who are already habituated to noise from tourism and shipping activities. Due to the small scale and temporary nature of the survey it is not expected to have any interaction with breeding, foraging or nesting birds or breeding seals.
Collision risk	Not significant - Species are already habituated to traffic from tourism and shipping activities so collision risks from a small number of additional boat trips are considered not significant

<u>In-combination effects</u>

MARA has developed a stepwise approach for identifying other plans and projects that may impact on European sites in-Combination with the proposed maritime usage. Using professional and scientific judgement, the key steps for assessing cumulative effects are as follows:

1. Defining the Cumulative Effects Spatial Scope (CESS)
2. Defining the Cumulative Effects Temporal Scope (CETS)
3. Impact identification

4. Pathway identification
5. Prediction
6. Identification of Plans or Projects that could act in combination
7. Screening Stage Cumulative Effects Assessment conclusion
8. Managing cumulative impacts - to be carried out as part of Stage 2 AA process

The CESS has been defined as as the MUL area applied for as defined in Figure 1, and the CETS as 2 years. The definition of the CESS is based on the impact of the proposed maritime usage activities and the CETS is the Maritime Usage Licence period.

A search of relevant databases undertaken on the 19/08/2025. No relevant projects were found within the CESS and the CETS.

The following plans, related to the development of the maritime environment were also considered:

- The Climate Action Plan 2025;
- The Water Action Plan 2024;
- Kerry County Development Plan 2022-2028

Likely significant in-combination effects between this application and the plans listed above on the conservation objectives of the European sites considered in this report can be excluded at this stage.

Were mitigation measures considered during the screening process?

No

5. Screening Determination Statement

The assessment of significant effects:
On the basis of the information on file, and having regard to:

- The nature and scale of the proposed development
- The distance to the nearest European sites
- The potential for in-combination effects with other plans and projects
- Possible physical disturbance
- Possible visual and above water noise disturbance
- Possible collision risk

Having considered the legal framework applicable to appropriate assessment, it was concluded that the proposed maritime usage by APEM Ireland to conduct Marine environmental surveys for the purposes of site investigation or in support of an application under Part XXI of the Act of 2000. at Great Blasket Island, Blasket Sound, Co. Kerry (MUL240001) will not require Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment.

It can be excluded, on the basis of objective scientific information, that the proposed project, either individually or in combination with other plans or projects, will have a significant effect on a European site.

Signature and Date of Recommending Officer	Dr Ciar O'Toole Senior Marine Advisor	21/08/2025
Signature and Date of Decision Maker	John Evans Director of Assessment, Research and Data Unit	08/09/2025